(d) and (e) International air traffic to/from India has been increasing over the years but air India has not been able to fully utilize its traffic rights due to its small and ageing fleet. This has resulted in loss of market share for Air India. Increased competition and declining yields have put pressure on air India's profitability. These new aircraft would replace some of the older aircraft in the fleet apart from increasing the fleet strength. Acquisition of new aircraft is expected to take care of Air India's requirements in terms of growth and reach and increase its market share.

Direct Air Service between Kathmandu and Bagdogra

1408. SHRI PRASANTA CHATTERJEE. Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the public demand for direct flights between Kathmandu and Bagdogra; and

(b) if so, the details of action taken so far to fulfil the demand?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI PRAFUL PATEL): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Due to operational constraints at Bagdogra airport as well as existing aircraft resource constraints, Indian Airlines is unable to consider introduction of flights between Bagdogra and Kathmandu at present.

International Air Connectivity at Regional Airports

1409. SHRI RAJEEV SHUKLA: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government are taking steps to improve international air connectivity at regional airports outside the metros; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINSITRY OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI PRAFUL PATEL): (a) and (b) Air India and Indian Airlines are operating international services from the following airports besides the 4 metro cities of Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai and Kolkata:—

Ahmedabad, Goa, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Kochi, Kozhikode, Thiruvananthapuram, Amritsar, Lucknow, Coimbatore, Gaya, Guwahati, Jaipur, Trichy and Varanasi.

As part of the ASEAN offer, designated airlines of all ASEAN countries have been permitted to operate unlimited number of services to 18 non-